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ABSTRACT

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Client Perceptions of Prison Counselor Effectiveness

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Running head: Prison Counselor Effectiveness

Abstract

Research evidence indicates that counselors rated as more effective are lower in dogmatism. Additional research suggests that the counseling relationship with delinquent populations is different from that with nondelinquent populations. It is the intent of this study to investigate perceptions of counselor effectiveness held by clients in a major urban minimum security Federal prison. Thirty-six residents completed rating scales regarding the counseling relationship with their respective counselors (N = 9) using the Counseling Evaluation Inventory, Relationship Questionnaire, and the Scale of Counselor Effectiveness. The counselors had previously been identified as high and low dogmatic on the basis of Dogmatism Scale scores. Data analysis by t-tests failed to support hypotheses regarding low dogmatic counselors being perceived as more effective. The study concludes that the counseling relationship with delinquent populations may indeed be different, since the delinquent clients in this study perceived the high dogmatic counselor to be more effective.

Client Perceptions of Prison Counselor Effectiveness

Canadians are being sent to prison in record numbers. In 1972, statistics show 21,727 citizens were incarcerated in federal and provincial institutions (The Criminal in Canadian Society, 1973). The public has come to look upon the convict as having been transformed from a human being to some lower form of being. A similar dehumanization of the convict exists among many professionals including counselors, for the counseling profession has made corrections its lowest priority. A climate is thereby established in which the correctional system can lock the public out and the convict's problems in (Dye & Sansouci, 1974).

Despite this situation, counselors are being employed in ever increasing numbers in prisons. The majority have been trained at the bachelor's level, usually in the social sciences but seldom in counseling (Neil & Hecker, 1974). In several Canadian federal correctional centers, people employed as counselors have neither bachelor's degrees nor training in facilitative interpersonal skills.

A great deal of use has been made of nonprofessionally trained persons in fields other than corrections with some degree of success. They have been used in psychiatric hospitals (Goldberg,

Evans, & Cole, 1973); mental health centers (Poovathumkal, 1973; Silverman, 1972); the home (Krauss & Delaney, Note 1); veterans' hospitals (Johnson, Katz, & Gelfand, 1972); drug addiction centers (Perlman, 1972); and schools (Pyle & Snyder, 1971). Several studies (Carkhuff, 1971; Grzegorek & Kagan, 1974; Katrin, 1974; Megathlin, 1969) point to the usefulness of nonprofessionals in correctional settings.

Rogers (1942) has identified several necessary conditions for therapy, among which is that the client be relatively free of excessive instabilities, and that the client be able to exercise some control over his environment. Both of these are restricted in the prison setting. Kellner (1967) has suggested that therapist-client relations that are effective with nondelinquent groups might be quite different from those that are effective with delinquent groups. He concludes that the therapist's personality has a great influence on counseling outcome.

One such personality variable identified as a criterion for effective counseling is counselor openness (Walton & Sweeney, 1969). The defensive, insecure, threatened (high dogmatic) person does not approach new experiences openly. Such people tend to ignore, rationalize, distort, or narrow their experiences in order to deal with them (Kemp, 1961, 1962). Others (Russo, Kelz, &

Hudson, 1964; Stefflre, King, & Leafgren, 1962) have found that counselors identified as effective by peers and judges scored low on the Rokeach (1960) Dogmatism Scale. Cahoon (1962) goes as far as to say that superior counselors are significantly less dogmatic.

Counselor effectiveness has been determined by means of ratings by peers, expert/supervisor, self, coached client, or client. The results show conflicting results with client ratings in greatest dispute. Some evidence does exist to support the use of client ratings. Pfeifle (1971) found that clients could distinguish between counselors who had had a practicum and those who had not. Clients have been shown to be able to identify progress in therapy (Horenstein, Houston, & Holmes, 1973). In the context of this study, the use of client ratings of counselor effectiveness is assumed to be appropriate.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the therapeutic relationship in a prison setting in terms of client perceptions of counselor effectiveness. It is hypothesized that:

1. Low dogmatic counselors will be perceived as being more effective than high dogmatic counselors. Measurement of effectiveness will be obtained from the Counselor Effectiveness Scale (CES) and the total scale score of the Counseling Evaluation Inventory (CEI).

2. Client satisfaction, as measured by the CEI, will be greater with low dogmatic counselors.

3. The overall therapeutic relationship, as measued by the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ), will be perceived to be better with low dogmatic counselors.

4. Low dogmatic counselors will be seen as providing higher levels of facilitative conditions (i.e., counseling climate, counselor comfort, empathy, warmth, genuineness, intensity and intimacy, and concreteness).

Method

Instruments

Client perceptions of counselor effectiveness were measured with three instruments: The Relationship Questionnaire (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967), the Counselor Effectiveness Scale (Ivey, Normington, Miller, Morrill, & Haase, 1968), and the Counseling Evaluation Inventory (Linden, Stone, & Shertzer, 1965).

The RQ consists of 141 true-false items designed to assess six aspects of the counseling relationship: empathy, warmth, genuineness, overall therapeutic relationship, intensity and intimacy of contact, and concreteness. It is an adaptation of the Barrett-Lennard (1962) scale set up so that clients can easily rate their

counselors.

One score of counselor effectiveness is obtained from the 25-item semantic differential type CES. Clients' attitudes towards their counselor provide the basis of the resultant scores. Ivey et al. (1968) report significant inter-rater reliabilities and consider the instrument to have valid discriminative ability.

The CEI is a Likert-type scale consisting of 21 items. Scores in four areas--(a) counseling climate, (b) counselor comfort, (c) client satisfaction, and (d) total score--are obtained by appropriate addition of weighted item results. The authors consider the total score to be an appropriate measure of counseling effectiveness. Test-retest reliabilities for total score over a 14-day interval are reported to be .83, indicating adequate stability.

Levels of counselor dogmatism were determined by using the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale, Form E (Rokeach, 1960). The scale is a semantic differential type yielding two scores: one of dogmatism, the other authoritarianism. Reliability of this 41-item instrument is considered sufficiently high, ranging from .71 to .93 depending on the group tested.

Subjects

Nine counselors (all male) who participated in the study were those who had been employed at the minimum security community cor-

rectional center in Edmonton for a year or more. All had had previous correctional experience and all had had some university or college training, although not to degree standing in counseling, prior to being employed at the center. Their ages ranged from 24 to 44, with mean age being 32.5.

Clients (N = 34) (all male) were selected from the center's population of 57, on a voluntary basis. All clients were gainfully employed in the city and had known their counselor for at least one month. The ages of the clients ranged from 20 to 54. The mean age was 35.1 (Median 26.1).

Research Design

High and low dogmatic counselor groups were identified and t-tests for differences of means were done on the dependent variable, CEI, CES, and RQ scores.

Procedure

The Dogmatism Scale was administered to the counselors during a staff training session. The results were then arbitrarily split into high and low groups. Those scoring between 165 and 135 (N = 5) formed the high group; those scoring between 131 and 95 (N = 4) formed the low group. The two group means were tested for signifi-

cant differences.

Clients on each counselor's caseload were interviewed individually and asked if they would provide ratings of their respective counselors, given the assurance that anonymity would be preserved. Each client was then provided with the questionnaires, instructed in their use, and asked to indicate the name of their counselor on the face sheet.

Results

It was found by the tests of the means for the two counselor groups that they were significantly different in dogmatism scores ($t = 4.36$, $df = 7$, $p < .01$). The two groups were labeled high and low dogmatic on the basis of these results.

Shortly before the completion of the project, one of the counselors left his employment preventing further data collection from his clients. Rather than lose the information already collected, the two sets of ratings of his client's perceptions were included in subsequent analysis. Four sets of client ratings were obtained for six of the nine counselors. The remainder had six sets each.

The results of the t-tests for differences between the mean scores for the client ratings of the high and low dogmatic groups are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Hypothesis 1

Client perceptions of counselor effectiveness was investigated using the CEI total score and the CES total score. The hypothesis that low dogmatic counselors would be perceived as more effective was rejected. The *t*-value for the difference between groups on the mean scores for the CEI was significant ($t = 2.373$, $df = 32$, $p < .01$), but in a direction opposite to that predicted in hypothesis 1 (see Table 1). The *t*-value for the CES score failed to attain significance, clearly lending support to the rejection of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2

Client perceptions of satisfaction with the counseling relationship was investigated, using a subtest of the CEI. The hypothesis that clients would be more satisfied as a result of his experience with the low dogmatic counselor must be rejected. It can be seen in Table 1 that *t*-values do not reach significance levels.

Hypothesis 3

It was hypothesized that client perceptions of the overall

therapeutic relationship as measured by the subscale of the RQ would be better for the low dogmatic counselor. The hypothesis is rejected. The results presented in Table 1 show that *t*-values do indicate a significant difference between groups on the mean scores for overall therapeutic relationship ($t = 1.673$, $df = 22$, $p < .05$) but, again, in a direction opposite to that hypothesized.

Hypothesis 4

Low dogmatic counselors, it was hypothesized, would present a greater number of facilitative conditions. This hypothesis is also rejected. Table 1 indicates that *t*-values for counseling climate ($t = 1.922$, $df = 32$, $p < .03$), counselor comfort ($t = 2.915$, $df = 31$, $p < .003$), empathy ($t = 2.260$, $df = 22$, $p < .01$), intensity and intimacy ($t = 1.857$, $df = 22$, $p < .03$), and concreteness ($t = 2.274$, $df = 22$, $p < .01$) exceed the levels required for significance. The other facilitative conditions--warmth and genuineness --failed to attain significance level. While five of the seven facilitative conditions were found to be significant, the significance was, once again, in a direction opposite to that hypothesized.

Discussion

Obtaining results which indicate that clients' perceptions of

high dogmatic prison counselors are apparently more favorable is contradictory to what one might be expected to find (Cahoon, 1962; Kemp, 1961, 1962; Russo, Kelz, & Hudson, 1964). It appears, then, that the suggestion by Kellner (1967) and reiterated by Grzegorek and Kagan (1974) that the counselor-client relationship may be different for delinquent groups than for nondelinquent groups may have some merit.

One might argue the results in the present study simply reflect differences in counselor training and preparation. Since all the measures, excluding those not significant, favor the high dogmatic group, it appears unlikely that this is the case. Further, it appears unlikely that the results can be attributed to biased self-report, although this is perhaps more likely where what the client may report can be held against him. This would suggest that perhaps the client evaluations of the less dogmatic counselor are more direct and honest, whereas those clients who experience the high dogmatic (authoritarian) counselor are reflecting an ability to say the right things.

In addition, when one considers the generally punitive effects of prison on people, it seems logical for prison inmates to learn to say the right things to a person they see as a prison officer rather than a counselor. The client's perception of an ef-

fective prison counselor may be that of a person who assumes responsibility for the client's actions and lets him know what is expected of him. This, of course, in no way implies that the therapeutic effects of such a counseling experience are positive. It may be that the low dogmatic counselor is more effective if it is assessed by other means, such as recidivism or changes in the intervals between arrests.

What does become clear in this study is that prison clients are capable of differentiating between personality types, particularly on the dogmatism dimension.

Additional research is needed to clarify the relationship of dogmatism to post release effects. If it can be shown that the clients who experienced the low dogmatic counselor in the counseling relationship have a better record as citizens, one may have to conclude that in the long run low dogmatic counselors are more effective (Cahoon, 1962; Kemp, 1961, 1962). The present study makes the first step in that direction.

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Table 1

Differences of Means t Test for Client Perceptions of High and Low Dogmatic Counselors

Variable	Mean Hi	Mean Lo	df	t	p
CEI					
Counseling Climate	12.83	10.06	32	1.922	.03
Counselor Comfort	8.41	5.19	31	2.915	.003
Client Satisfaction	7.00	5.56	32	1.353	.09
Counseling Effectiveness (Total)	27.72	20.81	32	2.373	.01
CES	149.89	141.81	32	1.108	.13
RQ					
Empathy	38.17	28.00	22	2.260	.01
Warmth	60.25	54.33	22	1.166	.12
Genuineness	45.58	39.67	22	1.475	.07
Overall Therapeutic Relationship	105.58	89.67	22	1.673	.05
Intensity and Intimacy	48.67	39.42	22	1.857	.03
Concreteness	29.75	22.67	22	2.274	.01